DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 172 429 EA 011 861

AUTHOR Fowler, Delbert H.
TITLE Declining Enrollments: Staffing for the Eighties.
PUB DATE Feb 79
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (63rd, Houston, Texas, February 2-6, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Board of Education Policy; Citizen Participation; Decision Making; *Declining Enrollment; Expenditure Per Student; *Personnel Policy; *Reduction in Force; *School Closing; Secondary Education; Seniority; Student Teacher Ratio; Teacher Retirement

ABSTRACT

School districts that survive declining enrollments will be the ones who recognize that the problem exists and build their programs and plans to meet the problem. It is necessary to know community demography and develop farsighted, actuarily sound projections of the effects. As money is basic to the problem, it is necessary to know the fiscal characteristics of a particular decline and the possible resources that are available. In regard to staffing, administrators will have to become experts in labor management. Tenure and reduction in force policies will have to be negotiated. District incentives and early retirement may have to be re-evaluated and changed to meet changed circumstances. However, declining enrollments can be a new motivating force that will provide opportunities in education. With foresight, planning, and imagination, schools will benefit by new thinking and creative leadership to meet the demands of the times. (Author/MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED172429

DECLINING ENROLLMENTS: STAFFING FOR THE EIGHTIES

By Delbert H. Fowler

One of the major concerns currently facing American Education is declining enrollments in the public school systems. Since the early days of public education, we have experienced a steady, and even sometimes extreme growth in our schools to the point where many of us have anticipated that this is how it would always be. Many assumed that as our growth leveled off, we would have sufficient time to think and plan, and we would find answers to many of the then existing problems regarding school populations.

But the result has been quite the opposite! The problem has in fact change rapidly from too many children to too few. The cry of "not enough space" has become "what can we do with the empty classrooms?" Many of the beautiful buildings that were erected just two decades ago now sit empty.

Effects:

The mounting body of information on declining enrollments demonstrates that the effects do not have to be universally or totally destructive. The problem is not always consistant, and frequently shows variations as you move from region to region, state to state, and district to district. The treatment of the problem can be very painful, but it can also be a motivational force which can bring about creative and imaginative therapy for needed growth changes.

Generally speaking, schools will have to reduce their teaching staffs to correspond to student losses and still maintain some arrangement of quality curriculum. When school systems reach a point where they can no longer offer the needed curriculum then they have no recourse but to close schools. I am convinced that Districts with declining enrollments, who refuse to close schools, maintain those unnecessary schools primarily at the expense of the salaries of district personnel.

In Salt Lake City during a ten-year period, we had to close twenty-four schools in our change from a district of 43,000 students to one of 23,000. Projection for the next five years states that we will drop as low as 17,000 pupils. Yet during this time that we have been closing schools, we have remodeled many and have replaced six older ones with new plants. We have incorportated new programs and raised the level of our basic skills from below the national average to several months ahead. Furthermore, we have not released any teachers from their contracts for any reason other than "cause".

As the Board of Education is given money according to a teacher-student ratio, and we now have fewer students, there are simply things which you must do to live on the resulting reduced income. The pains of reducing staffs, closing buildings and limiting spending are less traumatic than having drastically inadequate money to operate the schools.

EA 011 861

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Delbert Fowler

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Basic Decisions:

Most districts with declining enrollments have decided, after considering all of the alternatives, that they have to make decisions in two directions. The choices that need to be made regard (a) Tangible items of books, buildings, and bussing and (b) Intangible items of cutting budgets and ending programs, meeting community demands, and handling personnel problems. My particular study has concerned itself with these intangible items, and some of the considerations, tools and alternatives that administrators can use in facing a school and district with declining enrollments.

1. Cutting Budgets and Ending Programs: One of the first considerations that an administrator must face as he finds that he has fewer students in the classrooms, and consequently a reduced income, is how can he operate the educational programs with less money. Districts that are able to decrease their spending, and live on tighter budgets, may be able to survive even with the smaller numbers of students in their classrooms. This of course becomes increasingly difficult as you become smaller and smaller.

Regardless of what a given district's situation may be, it becomes imperative to ascertain exactly how many students there will be, and, therefore, how much money is available with which to operate. Demographic studies must be made with necessary survival information. You must become informed about how many students are currently enrolled in each grade, what has happened in the past as they have progressed through school, and how many you can predict will survive each grade level.

2. Community Demands: Most community problems or demands are in reality people problems. Parents who have developed strong roots in a certain school area where generations of their families have attended school are particularly maudlin and possessive when a particular plant is threatened.

Of course there are many reasons why patrons become defensive when "their" school is considered for closing. They have frequently served in the PTA or baked cookies for sales or cheered for the athletic teams, and now are threatened with a strong school, a different faculty, new administration; and they prefer to not make the change. Most individuals can recognize that when finances become tight, and costs are soaring, that school districts must make certain adjustments to meet the problems of less money. Patrons, when they are given a full picture of declining enrollments, can understand the need to close certain schools. Unfortunately, most community leaders experience real distress when it becomes a matter of "their" school being closed, and they look for ways to close other schools instead.

What can an administrator do? To begin with, when Boards of Education realize they are faced with possible closings they school publicize that such a thing is possible, and let patrons know the possible options. Most districts that have dealt with this problem successfully have involved parents within the district in formulating the plans.

Deciding on the basis by which schools are selected for closing makes the final decisions much easier to digest, when the move is finally made. Along this same line of thinking, the wider the involvement of parental groups, and the greater the input from them, the more likely will be the acceptance of those final decisions. To adjust to the realities of fewer students, with fewer resources and to still continue to provide quality education is the challenge we must also meet. A school district that fails to intelligently manage and use all of its resources may soon find itself overcome by the magnitude of bankruptcy.

We must realize that, primarily, school closures are for the purpose of saving tax dollars. The basic issue is, will the public pay more to run smaller schools, or will they demand a limit to expenditures and to questionable productivity? Considering trends of this year there is a strong indication that there must be an accounting where all districts would agree that very small schools will be closed. By the same token, the complex process of handling the human resources in such declining districts is most vital if one is to survive. Many people both inside and outside the schools are affected, and trauma becomes considerable when unilateral decisions by administrators or power figures are made without the involvement of those individuals affected by the decisions. A basic rule with the greatest security is to involve the community and those representative power groups so that when a decision is finally made there is greater acceptance and support from the community as a whole.

3. Personnel Problems: The biggest and most difficult problem that any district with declining enrollment must face deals with personnel. While districts and schools are faced with fewer students, more space, and less money they do not necessarily lose teachers and administrators at a corresponding or balanced rate. Of all the decisions that schools are forced to make in connection with the decline, none can be so costly, or cause so much ill feeling as the decisions to reduce staff.

It would appear that as decline problems become imminent, the able administrator needs to determine the basis upon which he will reduce staff, if necessary. Negotiations should be made well in advance of the actual time of the crisis. The administrator should study his faculty and know the seniority of his teachers, their ability to teach or function in school areas other than their current assignment, and the certification of all teachers on the staff. While the needs of the faculty are important, they cannot be allowed to determine the curriculum or the needs of the total school. Example: because you may not have a natrual loss of social studies teachers, it should not mean that you have to maintain a higher proportion of teachers in that area or your staff.

In Salt Lake City through negotiations with teacher organizations the following three factors have been maintained as a basis for reducing staff:

1. Seniority of teachers.
2. Particular talents of each teacher.
3. The basic need of the school.

These three considerations are given equal value in the determination of which

teachers will remain on a school's faculty. Superintendents and Boards of Education who bargain away the latter two factors to the point of accepting only seniority are inviting destruction, and are placing their administrators and schools in an untenable position.

Therefore, it becomes essential that the Boards of Education must deal openly with this problem of stress. They must, from the beginning, involve these individuals who are thus effected into the total process. They must look for ways to assure them that the district is truly interested in them personally and that their future is secure. Our district found that at the beginning of our difficulties that it met this problem best by the Board of Education and the Superintendent publishing the policy that no one would be terminated because of the declining enrollment and the closing of schools.

4. Timing: Another important factor which must be considered, which is critical to the whole process, is timing. Most successful districts, which have closed schools and reduced staffs peacefully, believe that plans should be made at least two years in advance. During this time districts and communities should build their plans, and determine guidelines, such as which schools to close (if necessary), and decide on what basis faculties will be altered or decreased. Through all this process the wise administrator will develop problem-solving plans to meet the crisis period when decisions must be made.

CONSIDERATIONS AVAILABLE TO THE ADMINISTRATORS: or what do you do with the unassigned teachers and personnel after you have reduced staffs and closed schools.

1. Substitute teacher corps. Many districts have developed other uses for unassigned or surplus teachers. One technique that has been used with good success has been to organize a corp of such personnel as trained substitutes. Such arrangements can be especially valuable where contract teachers have extended periods of illnesses. Such an arrangement would offer the advantage of providing truly trained personnel for a difficult assignment.

2. Older teachers. The administration should consider the employing of older teachers for half days. Such employees would feel productive and useful, but would also allow a school district to reduce teaching numbers.

3. Average decline. States could also consider some type of financial structure which would cushion the local districts against rapid decrease in income. The simplest arrangement is to allow local districts to receive state aid on the basis of the previous year. Some states, such as Colorado, adjust their aid on the basis of the average enrollment over several years. Both of these adjustments allow districts the opportunity to make gradual adjustments to enrollment loss. Many states provide direct aid to districts having declining enrollment problems.

4. Neighboring districts. A tool that is rarely used but would seem to be both invaluable and logical is cooperation with a neighboring district that is experiencing growth which they are unable to cope with; by combining resources both problems are helped. The district which has the room makes

it available to the district with too many children. Students who are already on buses could be transported over one school district boundary where there are too many children to one where buildings are already built but only partially used.

5. New programs. In the process of reducing staff or closing buildings, administrators have an excellent opportunity to introduce those programs that they have thought about but never been able to put into action. When you are reducing offerings, why not look for different and more creative ways to educate with the changing life styles and different resources. Support from the community is increased if at the same time as you are cutting some programs you are adding others. During this time of reduction is a good time to aggressively search and write for new federal and state programs.

6. Early retirement. One of the real threats of the declining enrollment is the aging faculty and the possible loss of productivity. In Michigan they have encouraged early retirement by allowing teachers with thirty years in teaching to retire at age 55. It is believed that a natural attrition equal to the loss of students could be realized if early retirement plans are made more generous. The amount of savings to a district which could reduce staffs of highly paid teachers would be considerable.

7. Leave of absence. Minnesota has considered allowing up to five years leave of absence without jeopardizing seniority or pension plans with an option to return. According to NIE there is less than a forty percent chance that teachers will return after such a leave.

8. Cooperative placement. Superintendents and Boards of Education should seriously look for ways to work with neighboring districts in the placement of experienced teachers for whom they no longer have need. This arrangement could work for better morale of teachers, increase the efficiency of the neighboring district with quality and tested personnel, and assist in the problem of overstaffing.

9. Special training. The district could provide funding and incentives for teachers to develop skills in areas of district needs, viz. elementary education, resourse teachers, EMR, special education, etc.

10. Mid-year enrollments. Where possible, districts can adjust their staffing ratios and base them on mid-year enrollments. This has the advantage of stabilizing fluctuations over the year so that the fall enrollments which may be high will average for the year and give a more true picture of the total year.

11. Termination for cause. Administrators have not been effective in possibly their most useful tool in dealing with declining enrollments. As schools become smaller, the ineffective and poor teacher becomes more obvious, and his employment more questionable. Most administrators have found themselves, when they try to dismiss a teacher for "cause", as much on trial as the teacher, and they have generally preferred not be involved in the typical law suits and hearing thus generated. As a general rule, school professionals can only be discharged from contract positions for statutorally

created reasons. The major reasons for such discharges are incompetency, insubordination, immorality and "good cause".

When districts have a procedure for dismissal for "cause", it needs to be used. For too many years, ineffective teachers have been allowed to function in our schools. While the situation is difficult, and proof of ineptness is hard to come by, the fact is that administrators in a declining school must show the courage and tenacity to somehow demonstrate the ineptness of the poor teacher and then work for that teacher's dismissal. In such cases, where teachers have taught for many years, early retirement may and should be encouraged.

In Salt Lake City we have terminated 22 teachers in the last seven years--not many, but it is some. We have done this with the appointment of evaluating committees which are composed of learning specialists and teacher representatives. Principals have real trouble with the termination of people with whom they work and this procedure takes some of the pressure away from them.

Conclusion:

Can we survive the declining enrollment problems?

Those who survive declining enrollments will be the ones who recognize that the problem exists, and who build their programs and plans to meet the problem. We have to know the demography of our communities, and develop farsighted actuarily sound projections of the effects. As money is basic to the problem, we will have to know the fiscal characteristics of our particular decline, and the possible resources that are available.

In regards to staffing, we will all have to become experts in labor management. Tenure and reduction in force policies will have to be negotiated at a level at which high schools can carry on a successful program. District incentives and early retirement may have to be re-evaluated and changed to meet our changing times.

I have no doubt that declining enrollments can be a new motivating force which will provide opportunities in education. Districts will be encouraged to evaluate existing programs and even broaden the scope of their offerings. However, with foresight, planning, and imagination, our schools will benefit by new thinking and creative leadership to meet the demands of our days.